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SUBJECT: EGYPTIAN MEDIA THEMES, FEBRUARY 12-25.

1. Summary: Due to the visit of Secretary Rice to Egypt last week, this weeks media summary covers the period of February 12-25. During the first week of the reporting period (February 12-18), while 50 percent of commentaries focused on domestic issues, 18 percent contemplated tolerance of Islam and freedom of speech, with a heightened scrutiny against the ongoing violent reactions; and only 7 percent showed a negative perspective toward the U.S. During the second week (February 19-25), news and commentary focused largely on reaction to reports of Avian Influenza in Egypt (34 percent) and Secretary Rices visit (14 percent), with negative commentary toward U.S. policies

in the region rising to 27 percent. End Summary.

2. A Softening Tone. Commentary regarding the Danish cartoon scandal continued, but opinion toward western intolerance softened as rhetoric against violence strengthened. Writers also focused on the need for balance of press freedom and tolerance. Al Mehwar TVs "VIP" program on February 12 advanced the view that "Muslims should not succumb to generalizations about the West's reaction to Islam, that not all of the West is against the Muslim world." The editor-in-chief of independent weekly, Nahdet Misr (circulation 20,000) scolded Muslims who themselves have hurt and humiliated their prophet and pushed the west to put Islam as their enemy. Readers of a February 12 column in pro-government daily, Al Ahram, learned that "people must express their anger in the proper way in order to achieve their rights." Many commentators also ceded the need for press freedom, but focused on extracting positive outcomes from the controversy, namely, achieving international legislation to ban blasphemy (opposition daily, Al-Wafd, February 14). Many voices called for a peaceful method to express anger (Al-Ahram, February 14) and a dialogue among cultures to find the way to balance freedom of expression and respect for others beliefs. (Al-Ahram, February 14)

3. The Secretary in Cairo. Secretary Rices visit to Egypt garnered widespread media attention, from straightforward news reporting to significant television and print commentary. Between February 22 and 25, commentaries regarding the secretaries visit or U.S. policies rose to 30 percent, a significant percentage given the national Avian Influenza scare. During February 22 and 23, satellite and terrestrial television news and talk-shows concentrated on her visit and U.S. policies, to include frequent airing of her exclusive interview with Egyptian Television, and all major newspapers covered her visit to the region through February 25. Opposition

papers, such as Al-Wafd, highlighted her visit with civil society figures, and quoted her as disappointed in Egypts political reform and the Hamas victory, but sensing that major changes have occurred since her June visit. (February 23). According to independent daily, Al-Masry Al-Yom, Secretary Rice told civil society figures that the U.S. will continue to pressure the GOE on reform, and the paper indicated that the group was disappointed by her refusal to meet with the Muslim Brotherhood. (Feb. 24) In the opinion pages, commentary in the independent papers was critical, with postulations that her visit was made to prepare for a military attack on Iran (Al Masry Al Yom, February 21), to interfere in Egypts domestic issues (Nahdet Misr, February 21) and to convince the GOE to pressure Hamas and support the U.S. position on Iran. (Nahdet Misr, February 22) Some criticized the U.S.s ridiculous slogans about democracy and characterized discussions about Egypts democracy as t democracy as blackmail. (Nahdet Misr, February 21 and 22) At the same time, opinion pieces in large, pro-government daily, Al-Ahram (February 23) pointed to Secretary Rices friendly statements as proof of the depth of U.S.-Egypt relations. However, others saw such conciliatory remarks as contradictory and confusing given the postponement of the FTA talks. (Al-Akhbar, February 23).

4. Rumorville. The February 18 announcement that Avian Influenza was found in birds in several provinces in Egypt created a national scare, second only to the rumor spread on February 22nd that the Nile was contaminated with bird flu. The government turned to the media to calm public fears and commentators began to focus on the government response. On February 21 and 22, most of the evening news and talk programs focused on bird flu, and hosted health experts and government officials to calm fears of human

transmission. Some programs showed NDP representatives and government health officials eating cooked chicken and drinking tap water. Commentators largely called upon the GOE officials to collaborate with each other and take strong action. A senior columnist in Al-Masry Al-Yom, advanced a conspiracy theory that the government knew of the bird flu and is trying to contain the bird flu in order to cover for the ferry disaster, while the papers editor-in-chief urged that this is a time for national unity and praised the government for speaking openly and honestly. (February 22) Other papers asked the government to spread awareness through the media, (Nahdet Misr, February 22) to encourage transparency to help people make necessary sacrifices (Al-Gomhouriyya, Feb. 24) and asked the people to take up the challenge themselves to combat the illness. (Al-Akhbar, February 22)

15. The U.S. Image. The week of February 20-25 saw a rise in negative commentary toward the U.S. in both television and print for the first time in 2006. The re-release of photos of Abu-Ghreib, the concern with civil war in Iraq, differences of opinion over Hamas and the ongoing setback to the FTA discussions led to a concentration of commentaries regarding U.S. policies in Egypt and regionally. On February 22, Channel Ones evening talk show included a discussion on Guantanamo Bay with a human rights expert predicting that U.S.s torture crimes would lead to trials like Saddam Husseins one day. Nile TV on the same evening hosted a former GOE minister who rejected wholly U.S. assistance and FTA negotiations if it meant choosing against supporting Hamas. Pro-government daily, Al-Gomhouriyya, characterized U.S. policies around the world as catastrophic and told readers that the U.S. occupation forces plotted the explosions in Iraq. (February 23) Columns in pro-government daily, Al-Ahram, on February 25 blamed the U.S. for chaos and sectarian strife in the region, and opposition daily, Al-Wafd criticized President Bush over Iraqi torture at the hands of American soldiers and Americas false freedom and democracy. (February 22)

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